

## Public Surveillance: Security vs. Privacy, Part 2

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Ed Gordon talks with two experts about security cameras and their effects on civil liberties. Guests: Barry Steinhardt, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Program on Technology and Liberty, and Kristin Mahoney, chief of technical services for the Baltimore Police Department.

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ED GORDON, host:

For more on surveillance cameras and civil rights, I spoke with Barry Steinhardt, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Program on Technology and Liberty, and Kristen Mahoney, chief of technology services for the Baltimore Police Department. Baltimore recently installed a network of cameras throughout the city, and Ms. Mahoney says the results were immediate and dramatic.

Ms. KRISTEN MAHONEY (Baltimore Police Department): We've seen a tremendous decline in shootings and murders in the areas that we've had our cameras. In fact, we've had an 86 percent decline in murders and a 22 percent decline in shootings in the areas that we've placed our cameras, so we've had a really positive response.

GORDON: What have you found in the long term, areas where perhaps you have had cameras up for some time or studies you did leading into this?

Ms. MAHONEY: What we know is that cameras, in and of themselves, are not going to solve the problem, and we talked a lot to community groups about that. It requires a lot of hard work. The camera is just one tool in our toolbox, and it requires creative policing strategies. It requires public outreach. It requires community policing problem-solving. There has to be that kind of investment...

GORDON: Right.

Ms. MAHONEY: ...to use the cameras as problem solvers and not just stand-alones.

GORDON: Barry Steinhardt, take it from the aspect where Ms. Mahoney leaves it, and that is what's wrong with using video surveillance as one tool?

Mr. BARRY STEINHARDT (American Civil Liberties Union's Program on Technology and Liberty): Well, the primary thing that's wrong with it, of course, from a position of just an average citizen here, is it doesn't work. In the end, all it does is it moves some petty crime from places where the cameras are to where they aren't. Does it make people feel better who are in the particular area where the camera is? Perhaps. Is it making a particular spot safer? Yes. But it's just moving the crime somewhere else. As your guest said, there's a lot of tools that have to be put to bear here. Cameras, unfortunately, are not one of the better ones. They simply don't work. We have all the loss that comes with our privacy and none of the gain.

GORDON: Critics will argue that sometimes, it's hard to measure whether or not you see a statistic like the deterrent of a camera. While you may not see reductions statistically, you can't talk about crime that it has prevented if it's not on the books first.

Mr. STEINHARDT: Well, you know, it's really not that hard for trained academics to go in and say, 'Before the cameras were put in, the crime rate for particular crimes was X. Now it's Y.' If it's still X, then it appears to be no effort, no change.

GORDON: Right. But you understand the argument, you can't talk about whether it deters incremental growth that may have happened had they not been there.

Mr. STEINHARDT: Well, you know, if you look at the European experience, particularly the British experience here, they had to concede that it has had virtually no effect on the crime rate. When you think about it for a moment, you realize why. First of all, the criminals learn to adapt. They learn to go where the cameras aren't. Secondly, if you spend all your money on these camera systems, which are very expensive to operate and maintain and monitor, you have fewer dollars for cops on the beat, for example. And so that you get into the problem that you don't have the resources to spend on things that we know have a deterrent effect, we know have an effect on crime, whether it's the cop on the beat or it's social service. Now we have to ask ourselves, are we getting the bang we need for our buck here? And the problem is we're not.

GORDON: Ms. Mahoney, I want you to pick up on that, and also pick up on what we have heard

throughout the question of whether public surveillance is a good idea, and that is it is disproportionately used in communities of color.

Ms. MAHONEY: Well, on January 2nd, The New York Times reported that Chicago was having a turnaround in its homicide rate and that they had had their killings at their lowest tally since 1965. And the Chicago Police Department notes that this 25 percent drop in homicides is due, in part, to creative policing strategies and cameras. And so we went to Chicago and we looked at their creative policing strategies, and these cameras are one-time costs. They do not have ongoing costs to have police officers monitor them. That's one model.

I mean, people can use that model and say, 'Oh, we're going to have to take police officers off the street to model'--but in Boston, what we're using, a virtual citizens on patrol model, where we've invited citizens to come into our police district, have, you know, background clearances to make sure that they're not in the game, and to participate actively monitoring their neighborhoods, where they might not be able to physically walk around their neighborhood for threat of fear of retaliation, but they have no problem coming into a police district and working with some of our retired police officers. A local foundation provided us with a grant of \$200,000 to hire some retired police officers to work hand-in-hand with the community members...

GORDON: Right.

Ms. MAHONEY: ...to assist us with the monitoring. So...

GORDON: And what of the Big Brother aspect of it?

Ms. MAHONEY: First of all, the areas that we're looking at are in the public view, and there are things that police officers could see if they were on their beat anyway. In addition to that, we have a lot of procedures and protocols in place to make sure that what monitoring is done is done appropriately. For instance, if a citizen is concerned that the cameras might be able to look into a second-floor window or something like that, a request can be made, and we have the software that actually pixelates that window, so there is no way that you can even see that. Everything that the monitors record or look at is also recorded. So we are able to review that and make sure that the monitors that are spending their time on the cameras are using it appropriately.

GORDON: Barry Steinhardt, what of the racial implications of this? We have heard a lot of grumblings, quite frankly, that these surveillance cameras are being utilized disproportionately in African-American and minority communities?

Mr. STEINHARDT: Yeah. Well, I have no question that that is probably right. I mean, the truth is that whenever we introduce these technologies of surveillance, that we begin with the least powerful people in our society. In the end, all these tools are being disproportionately used against people of color and people of low income. I've got no question about that. You know, we also know, of course, that they're being abused.

I mean, in New York, for example, during the Republican National Convention, there were cameras in the sky. They were literally in police aircraft, and remarkably, one of the cameras was actually used as--they spotted a couple on a rooftop engaged in sexual activity, but they thought they were on their rooftop and it's dark, they thought it was a perfectly private place, and not only did the cameras continue to train on them, but when the woman left, they continued to follow her. So what you had essentially was video voyeurism. And we know from the studies that have been done in places where the cameras are used extensively, there's a lot of video voyeurism. People who monitor these cameras get bored, and so naturally, they focus on--unfortunately, they play out their worst instincts, and sometimes they focus on people of color and sometimes there are men who focus on women, and it's just a fact of life that people are going to do that.

GORDON: All right. Well, this--if we are to believe that George Orwell's thoughts are here, this is only the beginning, and we continue to watch and monitor. Kristen Mahoney from the Baltimore Police Department and Barry Steinhardt from the ACLU, thank you very much for joining us. Appreciate it.

Mr. STEINHARDT: Thank you.

Ms. MAHONEY: Thank you.

GORDON: This is NPR News.

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